

Proxies of Evil

The history of humankind is intimately familiar with the notion of proxy wars fought over centuries. The evolution of warfare has brought changes in strategies, tactics, hardware, and more, but the essence of these wars remains the same: they are fought through “proxy actors” or “proxy regimes” that pledge their loyalty to an external power for various motivations, including ideology, power, money, or personal interests. The advent of so-called “hybrid warfare” has further expanded the concept of proxy wars. Today, the battlefield is not limited to kinetic confrontation but extends to cyberspace (including social media), economic measures (such as undermining sanctions regimes), and the destabilization of institutions despised by external actors.

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An observant eye can notice similarities between external actors and their proxies in ideological

dogmas, power-grabbing methods, rhetoric, and even legislative adaptations. When a proxy regime controls a state, that state inevitably becomes a client state.

A brief look at developments in the Middle East vividly demonstrates how such proxies operate. Examples include Hamas in Gaza, Hezbollah in Lebanon, Ansar Allah (also known as the Houthis movement) in Yemen, and the (now dethroned) Assad regime in Syria, which has become a client state of Iran and Russia.

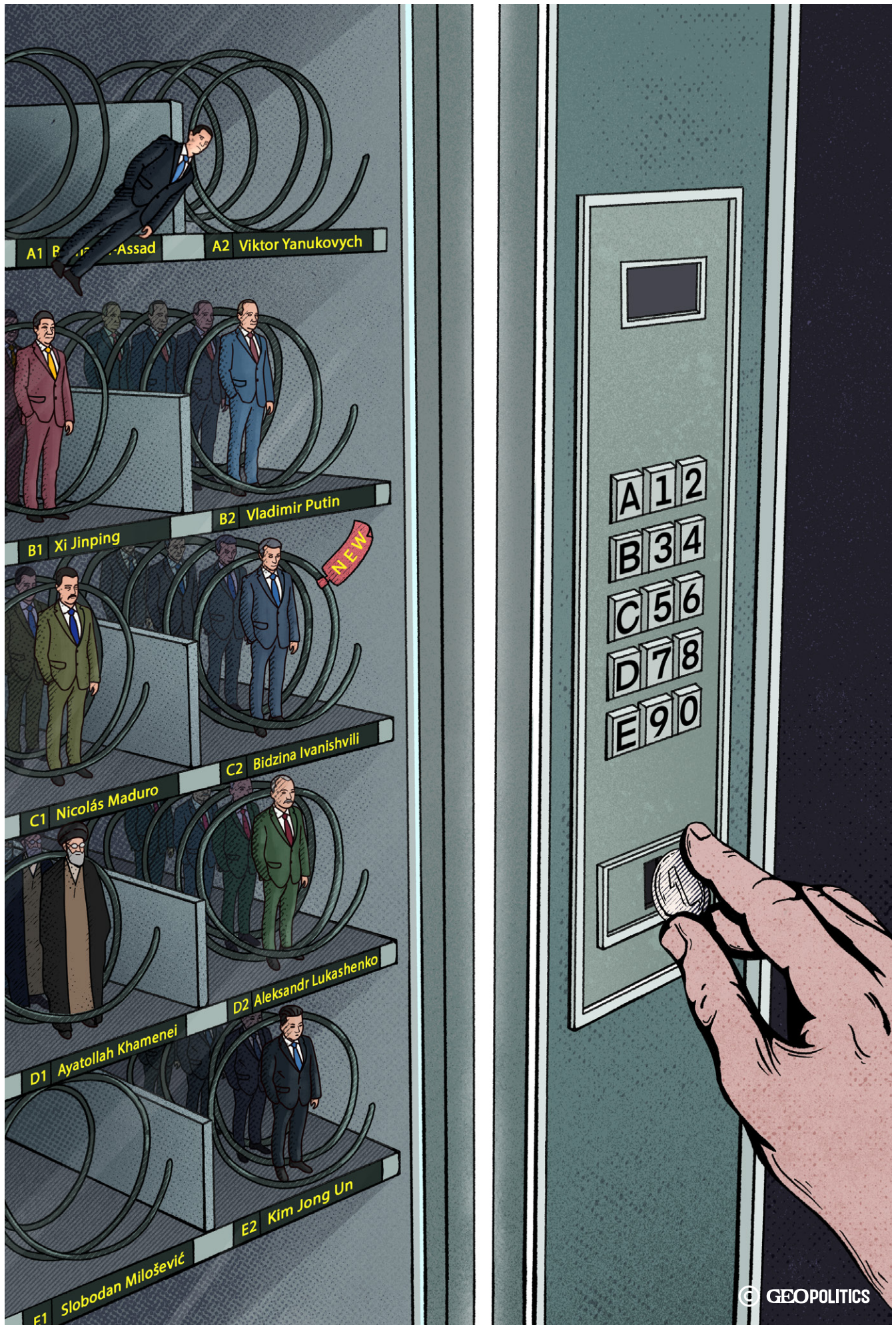
Historic References

As the Industrial Revolution advanced and challenged outdated feudal systems, foreign affairs, and international relations grew increasingly complex. This fundamental shift also impacted proxy warfare. Large states began forming formal alliances based on shared interests, often referred to as “axes.” Smaller countries and non-state actors gravitated toward these axes, eventually becoming instrumental in wars waged by the core powers.



TEMURI YAKOBASHVILI
Contributor

Ambassador Temuri Yakobashvili distinguishes himself as an accomplished leader in government, crisis management, and diplomacy. As the founder of TY Strategies LLC, he extends advisory services globally. A pivotal figure in co-founding the Revival Foundation, aiding Ukraine, and leading the New International Leadership Institute, Yakobashvili held key roles, including Georgia’s Ambassador to the U.S. and Deputy Prime Minister. With the rank of Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary, he is a Yale World Fellow, trained at Oxford and Harvard. As a co-founder and chair of the Governing Board of the Georgian Foundation for Strategic and International Studies, he actively contributes to global media discussions on regional security. His significant contributions have merited the Presidential Medal of Excellence.



One such alliance during World War II was the Rome–Berlin–Tokyo Axis. History books state that “the Rome–Berlin–Tokyo Axis became a military alliance in 1939 under the so-called ‘Pact of Steel’ with the Tripartite Pact of 1940 formally integrating the military aims of Germany, Italy, and Japan. These pacts formed the foundation of the Axis alliance.” The term “Axis” was coined by Italian Prime Minister Benito Mussolini in September 1923 when he wrote that “the axis of European history passes through Berlin.”

Soon after forming the Axis, Hungary, Romania, Slovakia, Bulgaria, and Croatia began orbiting around it, with some becoming formal members. Other states followed for diverse reasons, participating in Axis politics to varying degrees (e.g., Denmark, Finland, Spain). Special emphasis was placed on so-called “puppet states”—nominally independent governments formed out of local sympathizers but under varying degrees of control by Germany, Italy, or Japan. Examples included Albania, Serbia, Thailand, Burma, and Manchuria. Another category was “client states,” such as Greece (Hellenic State), Cambodia, Azad Hind, Inner Mongolia (Mengjiang), Laos, the Philippines, and Vietnam.

The Allied victory and the collapse of Axis led to a significant reshuffling of the world order. The victors determined the fates of those who served as Axis proxies. Some were fortunate enough to join the Western orbit, while others fell into the Soviet sphere of influence, exchanging one oppressive regime for another. It took decades for many Central and Eastern European states to regain real independence, address security concerns, and ensure economic prosperity.

The Soviet Union, one of the victors of World War II, quickly adopted the perks of proxy warfare, multiplying such regimes in its immediate vicinity (e.g., the Warsaw Pact) and globally through economic, military, and political support for anti-Western regimes and ideological allies, including non-state

actors like the PLO, Sendero Luminoso, Khmer Rouge, and others. The Cold War era was marked by numerous proxy wars: Korea, Vietnam, Angola, Congo, and Chile, to name just a few. The Soviet Union’s involvement ranged from limited covert aid to full-scale invasions. The suffering caused by Soviet-backed regimes and groups became synonymous with evil, prompting US President Ronald Reagan to label the USSR the “Evil Empire.”

The collapse of the Soviet Union reduced the number of proxy wars, although not the number of conflicts, which were now often waged for domestic or ideological reasons rather than aligned with a particular ideological axis. This collapse allowed many former proxies to reinvent themselves as modern, prosperous nations aligned with alliances of their choice.

In January 2002, US President George W. Bush [suggested](#) the emergence of a new axis—the “Axis of Evil,” comprising Iran, Iraq (under Saddam Hussein), and North Korea. These states were labeled as “sponsors of terrorism” intent on acquiring weapons of mass destruction. Later the following year, then Undersecretary of State John Bolton [expanded](#) the list to include other “rogue states:” Cuba, Libya, and Syria. This label essentially applied to all actors seeking to undermine the post-Cold War world order, displaying overt anti-Western sentiment through malicious policies and actions.

From this axis, Iraq, Libya, and recently Syria have seen regime changes. However, the collapse of these regimes often resulted in the sectarian fragmentation of their states, creating new breeding grounds for proxies promoted by external powers.

New Axis and Their Proxies

Although the US emerged as the sole global superpower after the Cold War, its prolonged engagement in the war on terror led to fatigue and a noticeable shift in strategy. The US transitioned from

a hard-power approach to one prioritizing soft power. However, this shift did not create the anticipated stability but instead left multiple power vacuums, quickly filled by revisionist forces. These forces interpreted the US's relaxed posture as a sign of Western weakness—capable of loud statements but devoid of meaningful actions or consequential policies.

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Revisionist powers, such as Russia and Iran, began exploiting these vacuums, reinvigorating proxy warfare. Russia returned to the concept of “spheres of influence,” employing traditional proxy war methodologies to multiply its proxies in various forms and regions.

Iran, on the other hand, openly established its “Axis of Resistance,” relying on proxies such as Hamas and other Palestinian militant groups in Gaza, Hezbollah in Lebanon, Islamic Resistance and Popular Mobilization Forces in Iraq, the Assad regime in Syria, and Houthis in Yemen. These proxies received financial support, weapons, military advisers, and extensive political and media backing.

Although some in the West argue the emergence of a new axis comprising Russia, Iran, North Korea, and China, the latter two states have not yet demonstrated meaningful reliance on classical proxies. However, One might argue that North Korea is effectively a client state of China.

The Rise and Fall of Proxies

The year 2025 begins with noticeable turbulence in international affairs, and the West finds itself in

a precarious position. The return of Donald Trump and his polarizing pre- and post-electoral statements further fuel uncertainty. Governments in Germany, France, Austria, and Canada face political challenges that will likely lead to changes in leadership.

However, the alleged “stability” of anti-Western regimes is even more fragile, and the same applies to their proxies.

In the past year, the world witnessed the dramatic decline and defeat of Hamas and other Palestinian militant groups in Gaza. Hezbollah in Lebanon faces a similar fate, and the surprising fall of Assad's regime in Syria will have long-lasting regional consequences. The Houthis are under relentless attack and weakening. Iranian influence is shrinking in the region, and its long-established Axis of Resistance appears on the brink of collapse if it has not already dissolved. Domestically, Iran itself faces unprecedented political and economic hardships unseen in decades.

Russian proxies are similarly struggling. Russia's attempts to undermine the West through election interference have failed, and its efforts in Romania and Moldova have backfired. Even more significantly, losing influence in Syria—and potentially its only military base on the Mediterranean—represents a critical blow to Russia's power projection in the Middle East and Africa.

Russia's use of energy as a tool for proxy wars is also backfiring. Regimes dependent on Russian gas supplies face severe vulnerabilities due to interrupted deliveries via Ukraine. Even staunch proxies like Abkhazia in Georgia and Transnistria in Moldova are grappling with energy shortages.

The downfall of “orphaned” proxies often has dire consequences for the populations they once controlled. While top leadership might find refuge or

protection, the rank-and-file often faces imprisonment, death, or social ostracism.

Against this backdrop, the behavior of Georgia's current regime raises not only eyebrows but serious questions.

Is the Georgian Regime a Proxy of Russia?

When Bidzina Ivanishvili and his Georgian Dream (GD) party came to power, he publicly declared that Georgia should refrain from active foreign policy and avoid aligning too closely with any major power bloc. While European and Euro-Atlantic integration was still nominally proclaimed as a national aspiration, practical steps in that direction slowed significantly or were primarily driven by inertia. The West dismissed early crackdowns on political opposition and attacks on civil society as minor transgressions.

This dynamic changed dramatically following Russia's full-scale military invasion of Ukraine. The Georgian Dream government and its leadership openly sided with Russia, criticizing both Ukrainian and Western governments. Georgian government rhetoric began mirroring Russian narratives, soon accompanied by Russian-style actions: amending laws to target civil society and political opposition, expelling opposition-minded Russian activists (including journalists) while welcoming Russian businesses and capital of questionable origin, undermining Western sanctions against Russia, and rigging elections.

Recently, the GD government cracked down on protests in a manner reminiscent of Russia's authoritarian playbook. These actions occurred alongside a persistent demonization of the West, labeling it the "war party" with party-controlled media and troll factories amplifying these narratives across social media.

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Comparing Georgia's current regime with those of other Russian proxy regimes reveals stark similarities in governance, rhetoric, and tactics. Thus, there is little doubt that Georgia's current regime functions as a proxy for Russia.

The motivations for this alignment remain speculative. On the surface, individuals like Bidzina Ivanishvili are better positioned to secure their interests by cooperating with the West. However, as cases like Viktor Yanukovich's regime in Ukraine illustrate, an intrinsic mistrust of the West often drives such figures into Russia's sphere of influence. The fate of Yanukovich—and recently, Bashar al-Assad—serves as a cautionary tale for Georgia's leadership.

How Georgia Can Avoid the Fate of a "Disposable Proxy"

Georgia stands at a critical crossroads, and its leadership decisions will determine its future. The nation faces two starkly different paths: It can remain a proxy of Russia and become a client state of an increasingly isolated, corrupt, and declining regime. Alternatively, it can accelerate its European and Euro-Atlantic integration to secure its place within the community of democratic, rule-based, and prosperous nations.

If the Georgian Dream government remains in power, the first path is inevitable, making regime change imperative for the second option to be viable. Achieving this change is easier said than done, but the current domestic and international climate provides reasons for cautious optimism.

So far, the regime has failed to suppress public outcry over fraudulent elections and the suspension of the European integration path. These protests bear a striking resemblance to Ukraine's 2014 Revolution of Dignity. As in Ukraine, Georgia's demonstrators are driven by grassroots movements rather than political leadership. The crowdsourced resistance presents an unprecedented challenge for the ruling regime, whose response has been a patchwork of ad hoc measures that have only deepened the political crisis.

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While the solution—new elections—is clear and widely articulated, the regime appears unwilling to risk another fraudulent “victory.” Instead, it seems to be pinning its hopes on protesters’ fatigue. However, signs of such fatigue are not yet apparent.

Adding to the uncertainty, the regime has suggested that political changes in the West—notably Donald Trump’s inauguration—will shift Western attitudes toward Georgia’s leadership. For seasoned foreign affairs analysts, such hopes are baseless fantasies or deliberate misinformation.

The Role of the West

The West must remain consistent in both rhetoric and action.

It must recognize the Georgian regime as a Russian proxy, which entails denying legitimacy to the current government at all levels, bilateral and international.

Western governments should invite leaders of major opposition parties and Georgian civil society representatives for high-level meetings.

The West must also support the opposition and civil society. Western governments should invite leaders of major opposition parties and Georgian civil society representatives for high-level meetings. Such gestures would empower pro-Western forces and demonstrate clear support for the Georgian people’s aspirations.

The West must also apply more sanctions and seek the Georgian Dream’s accountability. Building on the bipartisan “Megobari Act,” [reintroduced](#) to Congress on January 3 by U.S. Helsinki Commission Chairman Congressman Joe Wilson (R-SC), Ranking Member Congressman Steve Cohen (D-TN), Congressman Richard Hudson (R-NC) and Congressman Marc Veasey (D-TX). Based on the Act, further economic sanctions and travel bans should be extended to members of immediate families and the business enterprises of already sanctioned individuals. Additional individuals should be included in the list, and, importantly, such lists should be made (or leaked to the) public. It is crucial to focus on enforcing the sanctions by showcasing several cases of the effectiveness of such sanctions. The most relevant would be to focus on restricting banking services and freezing assets even if they are not located under US jurisdiction (secondary sanctions).

Furthermore, Georgian issues must return to the agenda of the allies, including Türkiye and the Arab states. The new Syrian leadership should be urged and encouraged to revoke Asad’s regime’s recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent states.

The West must also strengthen ties with Georgia’s legitimate representatives. The US and its allies

should bolster support for President Salome Zourabichvili, the last legitimate representative of the Georgian government.

Professionals in the relevant US agencies are well-versed in such situations and have multiple toolboxes. What they will need is a political push.

This is just a short list of crucial actions to be taken in the earliest days of the new US administration, but it is by no means all-encompassing or exhausting. Professionals in the relevant US agencies are well-versed in such situations and have multiple toolboxes. What they will need is a political push.

These actions would invigorate Georgia's pro-Western forces and accelerate the erosion of the current regime's power, ultimately paving the way for democratic reforms.

Shrinking the number of Russian proxies will be instrumental in pushing Russia towards ending the war in Ukraine and achieving long-lasting peace in the region under the US-European leadership. The alternative will not only be the Georgian Dream being transformed into the Georgian Nightmare but also a situation of prolonged horror with Russian tricks and threats of its new proxies ■